

Myth and Model. The Pattern of Migration, Settlement, and Reclamation of Land in Central Mexico and Oaxaca

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Abstract: A comparison of the documentation in the pre-Hispanic and early colonial pictorials and written texts from Central Mexico, Oaxaca and in between, shows parallels and a specific model for the settlement and the legitimization of land ownership.

Migration from a mythic place of origin is followed by choice of the new homeland, which is officially confirmed by the act of inauguration, i.e. a New Fire ceremony. Population growth leads to either the abandonment of a village or exodus of smaller groups, thus starting a new migration. The same procedure begins.

The Mixtecs started as early as in the Classic period to migrate to Teotihuacan and later to Mexico Tenochtitlan as immigrant workers. They were the first to leave their Mixtec homeland in the 1970ies traveling to the USA and Canada. Today, Mixtec communities can be found in Manhattan and all over California.

Keywords: migration; settlement; land ownership; Mixtec codices; pre-Hispanic and early colonial periods.

Resumen: Una comparación de la documentación en los textos pictóricos y escritos prehispánicos y coloniales tempranos del centro de México, Oaxaca y las regiones intermedias, muestra paralelos y revela un modelo específico para los procesos de asentamiento y la legitimación de la propiedad de la tierra.

La migración desde un lugar de origen mítico es seguida por la elección de un nuevo lugar de asentamiento, confirmada por un acto de inauguración, es decir, la ceremonia del Fuego Nuevo. El crecimiento de una población conduce al abandono de un pueblo o a un éxodo de grupos pequeños, iniciando así una nueva migración.

Los mixtecos comenzaron ya en el período Clásico a emigrar a Teotihuacán y luego a México Tenochtitlan como trabajadores inmigrantes. Fueron los primeros en abandonar su patria mixteca en los años 70 viajando a Estados Unidos y a Canadá. Hoy en día, comunidades mixtecas se pueden encontrar en Manhattan y en toda California.

Palabras clave: migración; asentamiento; propiedad de la tierra; códigos mixtecos; periodo prehispánico y colonial temprano.

Migrations in (Meso-)America from different perspectives

Using selected examples of pre-Hispanic codices and early colonial *lienzos* and *mapas* from the Mixteca and Central Mexico, this contribution describes the model of a migration and settlement pattern that has been regularly recorded, as well as passed down in the oral traditions, in Mesoamerica since Postclassic and early colonial times. It has its

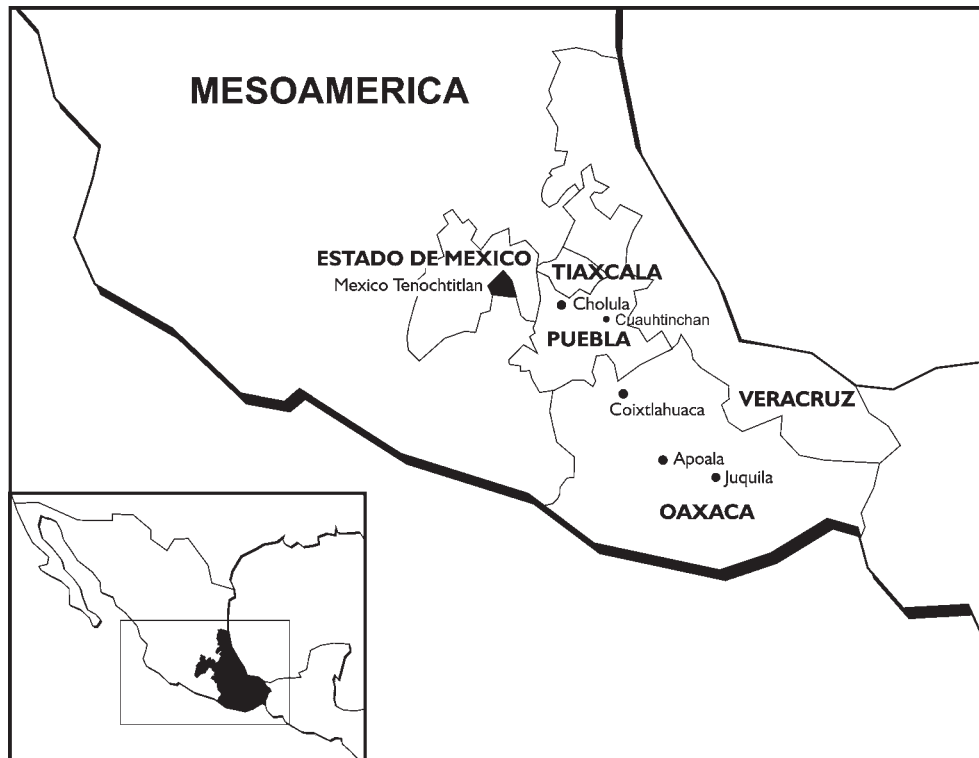


Figure 1. Map of Mesoamerica (drawing: Renate Sander).

roots far in the past. There can be no doubt that the life of the early inhabitants of the Americas was profoundly influenced by migration and settlement.

The mythology of migration begins with the earliest human settlement of the American continents. The hypothesis that the Americas (which are a European construct, too) were settled from Asia is not contested by any European scholar, even though there is some disagreement as to the time of settlement and the number of waves of migration. Most recently, genetic analyses of bone material have been particularly useful in corroborating that thesis (National Geographic Society 2014). However, there are many uncertainties both with regard to dates and the quantitative scope of settlement (Hey 2005). Another controversial issue is the intensity of Asiatic-American contacts in the millennia prior to the arrival of the Europeans in the Pacific (Fitzhugh & Crowell 1988).

The only ones who harbor doubts about the hypothesis of a migration from Asia to the Americas are Native Americans; referring to indigenous myths, they postulate

an origin of the indigenous peoples on the American continent itself. They feel vindicated by archaeological artifacts discovered in the southernmost part of the Americas, as well as by genetic evidence suggesting a rather recent migration from Asia to America.¹ Indigenous myths from the Pacific Coast mention big floods and a rise or lowering of the sea level; this is supported by some archaeological hypotheses (Fedje & Christensen 1999; Fladmark 1979; Gruhn 1994; McLaren 2008).

Another particularity of the settlement of the Americas, which supposedly took place in a north-south direction, invites reflection as well: The settlement of the American continents is said to have taken 'no longer than' 1,000 years (Yesner 2004: 202, 215). However, the most ancient skeleton finds suggest movements across the Americas, including migration in a south-north direction (Fitzhugh *et al.* 1999).²

The assessment of indigenous myths gives rise to tricky questions as well: What depth in time is preserved in traditions that have been passed down orally without having ever been recorded on any medium? To bolster the claims that several millennia are covered by oral traditions, myths are adduced which relate to real events, mentioning eruptions of volcanoes, the formation of craters, meteorite impacts, floods, etc. (geomythology). Examples include the Crater Lake, Oregon, in the myths of the Klamath people and meteorite impacts in Australia (Hamacher 2014; Piccardi & Mass 2007).

In Mesoamerica, it is difficult to provide evidence of migration in the Classic and Formative periods on the basis of archaeological sites and discoveries alone. Transregional and transcultural connections are evident from the Formative/Preclassic period onward. While the core region of early Olmec culture was on the Gulf Coast (Veracruz and Tabasco), there is evidence of Olmec influence in western Mesoamerica (Teopantecuanitlan, Guerrero) and Central Mexico (Tlatilco) (Diehl 2004).

Metal-processing technologies reached Mesoamerica from Peru and Columbia (earliest evidence: Second millennium BC) as well as from Central America (by the end of the first millennium AD). The Mixtec were masters not only of processing metal but also of iconographic advancement. For more than 1,000 years, they were renowned all over Mesoamerica for their goldsmithing skills (Jones 1985: 11-12).

As far as the Classic period (200-600 AD) is concerned, there is evidence of multi-ethnic quarters (the Zapotecs of the 'Oaxaca Barrio') in the metropolis of Teotihuacan in the central Mexican highlands. This tradition continued up to the arrival of the Spaniards, as becomes evident from Mixtec objects found in the Templo Mayor of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan (Figure 2). The influence of Teotihuacan (long-distance trade?) extended all the way to the Maya region.

1 One example of many is the link "Origins" (2013): <<http://drarchaeology.com/culthist/origins.htm>> (27.08.2016); see also Christie 2009.

2 Includes a summary and suggestions for further reading.

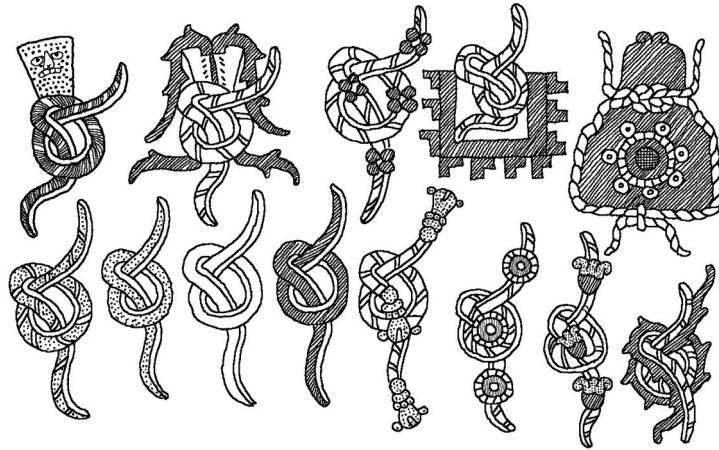


Figure 2. Codex Vindobonensis obverse 38. 13 place bindings represented by a knotted Mountain and 12 knots (drawing: Renate Sander).

After the decline of the Classic metropolis, the Nonoalca and Tolteca migrated to central Mexico and founded Tula in the 10th century (Prem 2008: 21-23). The histories of migration, which were not only passed on from memory in oral traditions but also recorded pictographically, set in with these migrations. The Chichimecs, who came from the north somewhat later, attached importance to recorded memory too, both with regard to migration and the establishment of settlements. In Oaxaca and the Maya region, the mythic origin is associated with subsequent migration as well.

However, people's residence at their new places of settlement is not without challenges; there are either internal conflicts or attacks by outsiders. After several generations, population growth leads to either the abandonment of the village or an exodus of smaller groups, thus initiating a new migration. The process repeats itself (König 2010: 125-133).

From the Postclassic onward, creation stories and migration stories were recorded in large parts of Mesoamerica.³ But for what reason? And what was the purpose of these recordings? Can we comprehend, from the perspective of western 21st-century scholars, the motivations of indigenous Mesoamerican authors who had to adapt to a new situation in colonial times?

3 For summaries of the situation see Florescano 2006 and Pohl 2003a.

Pohl reminds us that “By and large, creation stories described the origins of the universe and in so doing accounted for the movements of peoples and their claims to land and property, [...] on the other hand were typically placed in post-creation times and blended factual accounts with mythic traditions” (Pohl 2003a: 61).

As has been stated by the Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr.: “Native creation myths, in contrast to the Jewish/Christian account of Genesis, are not about what happened ‘then’, they are about what happened ‘here’” (Deloria 1992: 78).

The ‘here’ was always related to the ‘there’: In the Postclassic, Mixtecs, Chochos, Nahua-speaking Chichimecs, and other ethnic migrants moved both from the north to the south and from the south to the north. There are accounts of this in pictographic records dated to the 12th century (Castañeda & Doesburg 2008; Wake 2007: 207). Cholula was a multiethnic center. The pre-Hispanic Mixtec codices mention alliances with the Zapotecs (Pohl 2003a). As becomes apparent from the archaeological record, the Mixtecs traditionally counted among the most mobile ‘migrant laborers’ (see above). They were also among the first to migrate to Mexico City around 1900, to the north of the republic from the 1940s onward, and to Canada in the 1970s (Durand, Massey & Charvet 2000; Durand, Massey & Zenteno 2001). Migrations in the region of Mesoamerica were, therefore, by no means complete when the early colonial period set in. Since the last third of the 20th century, there has again been large-scale migration in a south-north direction.

“In a sense, the story of ancient Mexican history is the story of people and their symbols moving from place to place” (Carrasco & Sessions 2007: 428). Hence, it is not surprising that the ancient theme of migration plays an eminently important role both in the pre-Hispanic codices of the Postclassic and the early colonial records such as the *lienzos* and *mapas*.

However, I am not concerned with the historical truth of the records but with the information they contain about migration and settlement as seen from the perspective of their authors and the latter’s audiences. What were their motivations?

“Essentially Mesoamerican migrants searched for an environment with specific characteristics that comprised several symbolic levels” (Garcia-Zambrano 1994: 217-218). According to Garcia-Zambrano, the places chosen were supposed to remind people of important moments in the mythical creation of the world, “when the waters and the sky separated and the earth sprouted upwards” (Garcia-Zambrano 1994: 217-218). The framework for this was provided by the Mesoamerican concept of the world in the shape of a quincunx made up of the four cardinal points surrounding a center; there are numerous depictions of this in the codices and *lienzos*.⁴ The tree of life, standing on a hill that was later

4 A well-known example is shown on the title page of the Codex Fejérváry Mayer.

symbolized by artificial, man-made pyramids, is rooted in the underworld and connected with the sky by its foliated branches. The concept of the Mesoamerican community is based on the notion of the ‘water-filled mountain’, called *altepetl* in Aztec. Sceneries featuring conspicuous mountains, caves, trees, rivers, or combinations of these lent themselves either as mythical points of departure of migrations or as the latter’s final destinations.⁵

It was important to remember the mythical-historical origin, and to legitimize the *altepetl*’s claim to land as well as the power, status, and rule of the elites. While there were regional differences, the basic pattern needed to be distinguishable cross-linguistically, both in oral tradition and in the records. The alleged ‘discovery’ of the seven caves of Chicomoztoc in various places in Mesoamerica is irrelevant for that pattern, as is the issue of authenticity: “These cavities, when ritually dedicated to the divinities, became the pulsating heart of the new town, providing the cosmogonic referents that legitimized the settlers’ right for occupying that space and for the ruler’s authority over that site” (Garcia-Zambrano 1994: 218).

The site chosen for the establishment of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan was mainly suited for that purpose because it had appropriate features: The eagle eating a snake was sitting perched on a cactus “growing over two caves from which water was issued”. This was “part of a pattern found in numerous places which dates from the Preclassic all the way to the conquest” (Aguilar 2005: 83-84).

Creation and origin, migration and settlement – Sources, historical context and models

Zobrover summarizes current studies as follows:

The intense Late Postclassic population movements [...] on an unprecedented scale in Mesoamerican history was accompanied by an equally substantial body of documentary and material records [...]. The 13th and 14th centuries [...] show an intense interaction between the Mixteca, the Valley of Oaxaca, and the Central Highlands [...] and an ‘international’ symbol set of a shared elite identity and religious ideology, while phoneticism was downplayed in these communication networks so to accommodate to these polyglot and multiethnic social landscapes (Zobrover 2014).

Within the substantial body of documentary records, Boone distinguishes two categories of stories: “a) the story of origins, which leads to the founding of a polity; and b) the story of growth or continuity from the time of a polity’s founding” (Boone 2000a: 28). The so-called ‘migration stories’ illustrate the departure from an ‘ancient and mythical

⁵ Many studies attempt to establish the locations of mythical places that feature characteristics of existing landscapes; see, for example, the edited volumes by Brady & Prufer 2005; Carrasco & Sessions 2007; Christie 2009.

homeland', the arduous and dangerous journey, and eventually the establishment of a settlement in a place chosen by the migrants.

"How true are the Tolteca Chichimeca migration stories as history?", asked Pohl and looked for answers in all pictorial and written sources of groups speaking Nahuatl, Mixtec, Chocho-Popoloca, Zapotec, etc. (Pohl 2003a).⁶

Romero Frizzi explored the motivation behind the creation of the early colonial pictographic records in Latin script, and studied the decision-making processes: "What sort of relationship exists between a community's selected memory of events and its ideological orientation, between collective memory and the struggle for power?" (Romero Frizzi 2012: 91).

To get answers to these questions, Romero Frizzi not only consulted the codices, *lienzos*, and painted maps, but also the Latin-script records written by indigenous authors: Wills, land titles, baptismal records and – most specifically – the so-called primordial titles. She asks: Are we dealing with myths and/or historical traditions, real and/or fictional events, fragmentary and/or manipulated views depending on individual or collective memory? What mattered ultimately was defending the "autonomy of their domain (*altepetl*) and legitimize their political power" (Romero Frizzi 2012: 93).

On the basis of the existing studies, I will in the following describe a model that becomes apparent from the pictographic records – a language-independent basic pattern of documenting creation and origin, migration and settlement, which was used to legitimize land ownership and power structures. It is a Mesoamerican pattern revolving around the theme of migration in local variants and from various perspectives.⁷ The stages of that basic pattern can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The creation of earth and nature, decided upon and directed in the sky. A culture hero is entrusted with that task and descends to earth.
2. Human beings are born (emerge) in a mythical place on earth, either from a tree that is split open or from the maw of the bisexual earth monster. They then leave that place of birth.
3. Migration, stopovers, adventures and subplots.
4. Arrival at the chosen site, occupation and settlement of the place and its surroundings.
5. Rituals of legitimization and ceremonies of foundation.

6 The sources consulted by Pohl include Torquemada, the *Relaciones Geográficas*, and the *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca*; research on the historical backgrounds has been conducted by various authors (e.g., Ruiz Mendrano 2007).

7 The discussion in the present contribution does not include journeys that imply a return to the place of departure, such as sacred or ritual pilgrimages undertaken by either individuals or groups on some specific mission.

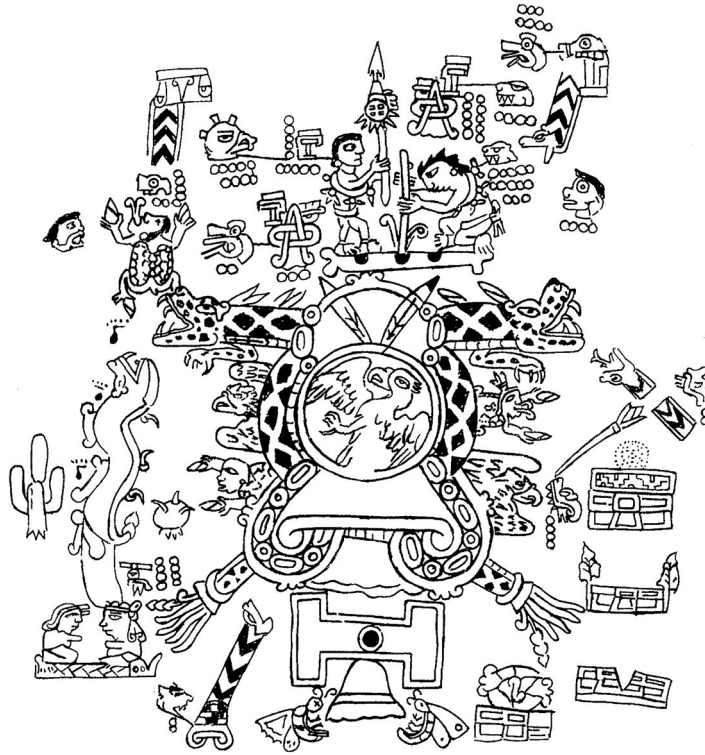


Figure 3. Lienzo de Tlapiltepec. Drilling the New Fire at 'Mountain of the knotted feathered serpent' (drawing: Renate Sander).

The question as to the templates for this pattern, particularly its oral versions, cannot be answered with certainty. However, we know from colonial sources and modern ethnographic records that the content of both the pre-Hispanic codices and the colonial *lienzos*, maps, itineraries, etc. was reproduced, or complemented, by a large oral repertoire: Calendar dates, origin myths, migration, settlement and the establishment of villages, prognoses, ceremonies, etc., were passed down *verbatim* orally. Lockhart confirms the existence of such oral traditions among the Nahuatl, and specific examples are analyzed by Megged (Lockhart *et al.* 2006; Megged 2010). Romero Frizzi (2012) studied Zapotec 'primordial titles'. Navarrete believes that while "the whole historical discourse was the result of the combination of the visual documents and the oral traditions", "the codices were full-fledged narratives and not merely mnemonic aides used as prompts for oral discourse" (Navarrete 2000a: 44).

In Postclassic pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica (ca. 1050-1520) – particularly in Central and South Mexico –, origins, genealogies, and historical events such as migrations were documented by means of largely language-independent graphic systems of communication based on pictographs. Pictographic records were very convenient in the large region where many languages were spoken. They enabled people to communicate about concepts such as world view, calendar, religion, and rituals. Unfortunately, only fourteen pre-Hispanic codices have survived. The *lienzos* and *mapas*, which have survived in larger numbers, were not made until after the conquest (Boone 2000a).

Doesberg complains that the key questions with regard to understanding these records often remain unasked: Why were these documents created? Each of them is undoubtedly rooted in the concrete context of a specific situation, making statements about topics that were relevant at the time it was made, such as the ascertainment of certain facts or conflicts about these. However, they are also part of processes and negotiations, and thus not static (Doesburg 2010: 97).

Using the example of the *Mapa de Cuahutinchán* (mc2), Carrasco describes the final destination of the migration, however, his interpretation doubtlessly applies to all other Mesoamerican records of migrations and settlement as well:

[...] the chief purposes for painting this beautiful document were to remember on the one hand how they achieved ‘a home in the world’ while on the other hand they were mapping their defense of that home for their present and future generations (Carrasco & Sessions 2007: 2).

Cosmogony and creation in the Codex Borgia: A time-based model

For a long time, researchers assumed that depictions of origin, migration, and settlement are only found in documents of ‘profane’ content. However, at least one of the ‘sacred books’, the Codex Borgia, has not only calendar-related, astronomical, ritual, and prognostic content but also addresses the creation of humankind (29-46) and the cardinal points (47-53). Elizabeth Boone concludes that this section is a narrative of creation:

Many of the structural and iconographic elements that one would expect to find in a Mesoamerican cosmogony are present: scenes of birth, emergence, and organization and the nearly constant actions of Quetzalcoatl, who is supremely a creator god for both the Aztecs and Mixtecs. We can also expect a Mesoamerican genesis to be accomplished through a series of supernatural acts and rituals, which is what we see in the Borgia. [...] Although there is no clear-cut correlation with other creation stories, a number of scenes recall specific places and actions that do figure in creation stories recorded in the sixteenth century for the Aztecs, Mixtecs, and Maya (Boone 2007: 173, 174).

Boone notes that there are many concordances with the version in the Codex Vindobonensis (to be described below) which include fire drillings used to consecrate new settlements and temples; most importantly, they feature emergence and birth. Quetzalcoatl appears in many different manifestations (Boone 2007: 174).

Were codices of the category exemplified by the Codex Borgia a model, or matrix, for versions that had various geographical, ethnic, or linguistic origins?⁸ The geographical provenance of the Codex Borgia is of significance, as the document is said to be from Cholula (Boone 2007: 227, 228), the important Postclassic center and site of the cult of Quetzalcoatl. Its special function in the history of migration in Mesoamerica will be discussed below.

The examples: Codex Vindobonensis from the Mixteca Alta⁹

The Codex Vindobonensis (also called Codex Vienna or Vienna Codex) is the most comprehensive pre-Hispanic source providing information on the beginning of time, the creation of the earth and people/Mixtecs, their living conditions, the establishment of religion and rule, settlement, and spatial expansion.¹⁰ According to Romero Frizzi, the primordial titles of the early colonial period are based on models such as the Codex Vindobonensis. She believes that “each royal lineage must have possessed a sacred book that attested to and confirmed the foundation of its power and authority, its ties to sacred power, and its right over particular lands” (2012: 93). In her opinion, the Codex Vindobonensis is a foundational title. And indeed, it is striking

[...] that the documents that have been classified as primordial titles share several features such as making explicit reference to a pueblo's founding, the establishment of its rights over particular lands, and the rights pertaining to its governing authorities” (Romero Frizzi 2012: 94).

Boone divides the Vindobonensis obverse into three sections:

[...] the first takes place in the celestial realm (52-49), the second is dominated by the earthly actions of the supernatural hero 9 Wind and then by the prototypical priest-shaman 2 Dog (49-23), and the third explains how the gods organized the Mixteca world politically and territorially (Boone 2000a: 90r).

8 Susan Milbrath believes that pages 29-46 “[...] detail only one year of the eight-year Venus almanac, because the year highlighted is of considerable astronomical significance”. However, according to Milbrath “it is possible that the mythology of creation she [Boone] explores is embedded in rituals of the festival calendar represented in the Codex Borgia” (Milbrath 2007).

9 Codex Vindobonensis is a screenfold made of 52 folded deerskin pages and today kept in the Austrian National Library, Vienna.

10 In comparison to the versions given, for example, in the Codices Nuttall and Bodley, much more importance is attached to the detailed account of the origins in the Codex Vindobonensis.

According to Boone, the first two parts show the distinct Mixtec version of the creation:

Codex Vindobonensis, Mixtec, obverse:

1. Beginnings in the sky, creation of the earth, creator couple 1 Deer and 1 Deer (52-51). The culture hero 9 Wind is born from a living rock (49).
2. The culture hero 9 Wind, equipped with all natural and cultural assets necessary to create the earth (more specifically, the Mixteca), descends from the sky to earth on a rope ladder (48). On his back he carries the sky and water (47).
3. 9 Wind founds 200 settlements. A date is given for each of these (47-38). A geographically correct sequence can be established for at least some of the villages that have been identified (Byland & Pohl 1994).
4. 13 place bindings are performed, enclosed by the date of 13 Rabbit, 12 Deer which is depicted twice. These bindings officially establish and legitimize the *altepetl* (38), (Figure 2).
5. In conversations with the powers of vegetation and earth, 9 Wind prepares for the birth of the first human couple, 1 Flower and 13 Flower, from a tree, which is said to have stood in the vicinity of Apoala in the Mixteca Alta (37). He is accompanied by 51 figures (ancestral couples?). More people, beings of nature, plants, animals, and rocks are created. All actions are directed by 9 Wind (35-34, Boone 2000a: 94).
6. On the pages that follow, 9 Wind and the 'prototypical priest-shaman' 2 Dog initiate ceremonies and ritual actions in Apoala, such as sacrifices, the first drilling of the New Fire (31), the construction of temples and steam baths, and piercing both their own ears and those of 44 other deities. Everyone is now given personal names. Three more ceremonies follow, pertaining to rain and the consumption of maize, pulque, and mushrooms. At the end, the sun rises (34-23).

Romero Frizzi points to the significance of the scene in which "[...] the Mixtec ancestors receive their second and symbolic name. This ritual of name changing takes place after Lord 9 Wind carries out the New Fire Ceremony and brings forth temples and steam baths" (Romero Frizzi 2012: 99).

There are similarities between 9 Wind and the Nahua culture hero Quetzalcoatl, and some of the places listed – such as the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl – are arguably located outside the Mixteca (39, Boone: 2000a: 93, 94). Nevertheless, pages 52-23 of the Codex Vindobonensis are about the specific creation story of the Mixtecs, which is embedded in the larger Mesoamerican context.

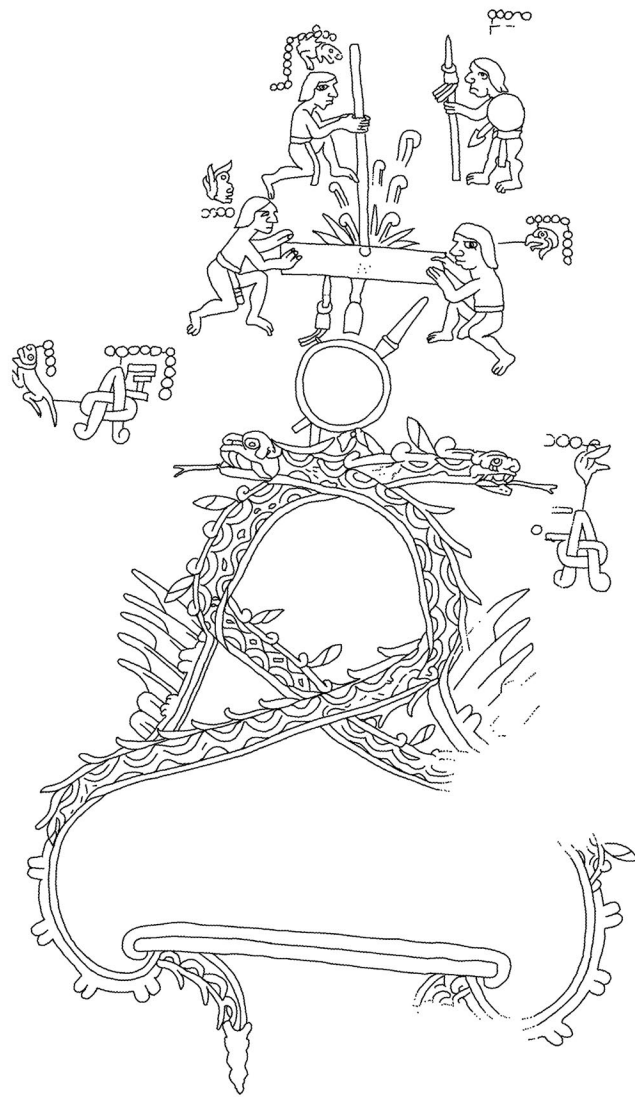


Figure 4. Lienzo Seler II (Coixtlahuaca II). Drilling the New Fire at 'Mountain of the knotted feathered serpents' (drawing: Renate Sander).

The third part, entitled “Ordering the Mixtec Land” by Boone, reflects the Mixtec version of migration, occupation of the land, appropriation, and legitimization. Legitimization is achieved by means of rituals that need to be performed – with variations only in details – whenever a village is founded. In the *Codex Vindobonensis*, the ritual is first depicted on page 32, and then repeats itself on nine other pages beginning with page 21 (pages 21, 18, 16, 14, 13, 11, 10, 5):

1. Symbolic calendar date, cradleboard with animal tail, binding of place, offerings.
2. Date 1 + year, 2 men with a tape measure, a stone with feet (foundation stone in motion), stone altar, ‘bloody’ steps, stepped pyramid, and a man tying a cord around a stone (measuring it?). Four different buildings follow, yet always in the same succession and with the same attributes: Eye, bird, blood, two bleeding cocoa beans.
3. Date, a man drilling fire, a man holding plants tied into paper.
4. Alternating mountain chains and place glyphs.

The migration, which takes place in nine stages, or two circumambulations of the four cardinal points around a center, as well as the occupation of places and establishment of settlements are legitimized by means of foundation rituals that are performed by authorized deities and priests.

The four concluding pages of the *Codex Vindobonensis* obverse (1-4) show the foundation of 16 additional polities (four on each page, Boone 2000a: 95). In terms of content and structure, these pages constitute a fourth part of the codex, depicting the status quo of 16 polities founded after the completion of the creation of the world, migration, settlement, and foundation ritual. This marks the transition to historical reality.¹¹ The quadripartite structure is important for an understanding of the *Codex Vindobonensis*: due to the narrow stripe format of the medium, simultaneous events need to be arranged sequentially, that is, behind each other. This is why some of the 200 place glyphs from the nine foundation – or two circumambulation – rituals appear several times (Boone 2000a: 94-95; Byland & Pohl 1994: 65).

The succession of nine fire drillings – after the first sunrise (23) and on the occasion of the village foundations –, which is depicted lineally on the stripes of leather, constitutes a separate category in the codex, because the fire drillings are directly related to the four cardinal points and the fifth point, the center (Jansen 1982 1: 245-268; Anders & Jansen 1988: 150). As is customary in Mesoamerica, the events of drilling must be read counterclockwise.¹² In the *Codex Vindobonensis*, the cardinal points are used to

11 As described in the other Mixtec codices.

12 *Codex Borgia* 49-52; *Manuscrit Aubin* 20.

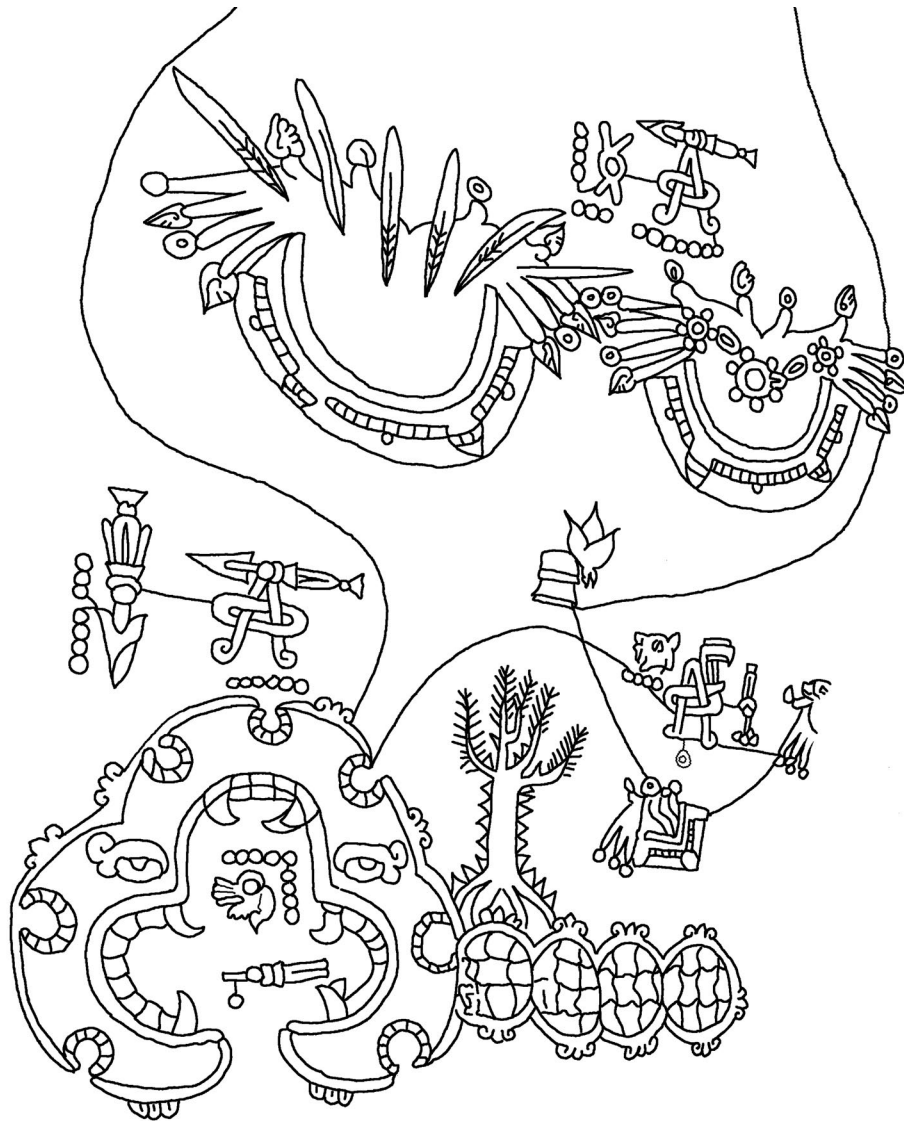


Figure 5. Lienzo de Tlapiltepec. The river 'feathers and jade' connected to 'seven caves' or Chicomoztoc represented as the Earth Monster (drawing: Renate Sander).

structure the land newly settled by the Mixtec ancestors, who migrate in all directions from their place of origin in Apoala (Jansen 1982 1: 276-277; Anders, Jansen & Pérez Jiménez 1992: 150-179; Wake 2007: 225).

On 52 pages, the Codex Vindobonensis obverse features a linear, horizontal, right-to-left movement of events and protagonists across time and space. This begins in the sky with the mythical, supernatural decision to initiate creation, which is carried out by the culture hero 9 Wind. The birth of first people from the tree near Apoala results in the 'historical' settlement of the Mixteca, undertaken in a joint effort by humans and gods (Boone 2000a: 94). The beginning of time and space is conceived of as an integrated whole.

A Zapotec example: A primordial title

Variants of the origin legends of various Mesoamerican peoples are recorded in Latin-script texts of the early colonial era. They include, for example, the Yucatec Chilam Balam de Mani and Fray Gregorio Garcia's summary of the Mixtec origin story as rendered in the Codex Vindobonensis (Restall *et al.* 2005: 177-184). These accounts are often combined with elements from the Old Testament such as the Deluge.

The structure of the Codex Vindobonensis as described above is discernible in the 17th-century Zapotec (Nexicho) *Memoria de Juquila*, which is still in the traditional pre-Hispanic style with "sentences that follow a repetitive rhythm" (Romero Frizzi 2012: 99). Written in the colonial period, it includes the account of a journey to Spain to "beseech mercy from his majesty the King", who is asked to appoint the priest Bartolome de Olmedo and the Alcalde Mayor Juan de Salina to serve in Juquila (Romero Frizzi 2012: 99). Otherwise, however, the 19 pages of the *Memoria de Juquila* reflect the matrix of the Codex Vindobonensis:

1. Appointment of four ancestral leaders and establishment of their right to govern the future pueblo. However, they are not authorized to occupy these positions by a pre-Hispanic deity such as 9 Wind.
2. Instead, the four ancestral leaders travel to Spain, beseeching the king to issue a royal decree on their behalf and to give them a (Catholic) priest as well as a political-judicial official who will administer justice in Juquila.
3. Return to their region of origin and beginning of a long migration journey, which is periodically interrupted by religious ceremonies.

4. Along the way: Baptism of the four ancestral leaders who are bestowed with new, Spanish names (see above, Codex Vindobonensis, remark by Romero Frizzi 2012: 93-94).
5. Founding of Juquila by Fray Bartolome de Olmedo, transformation of a sacred tree into a cross, marking of the boundaries.¹³

The comparison of just two manuscripts – a pre-Hispanic Mixtec codex and a colonial Zapotec text in a primordial title – already shows that records of migration, occupation of land, foundation of settlements, and legitimization of rulership are not merely about details of content, but rather about the basic structure of linear succession. This structure was evidently maintained for at least 500 years. The innovations that became necessary due to the Spanish conquest and Christian missionary work were integrated into that basic pattern; however, in that process, medium and format were changed and the linear layout was abandoned.¹⁴

Examples from the Coixtlahuaca Valley

The focus of the documents from this multiethnic region (Nahua-Mixtec-Chocho) is on records of the beginning and end of migration into the Coixtlahuaca Valley (Doesburg 2015). Even the large-format *lienzos* featuring long genealogical sequences (Tlapiltepec, Seler II) dispense with the biographical details known from pre-Hispanic codices of the Mixteca Alta. Instead, they focus on the New Fire drilling, which legitimized the (sacred) beginning of a migration and marked the establishment of a new settlement at the end of the migration (Figures 3 and 4). A symbolic, familiar type of depiction was chosen for that purpose: A mountain encircled by two knotted feathered serpents ('Mountain of interlocked feathered serpents, MKFS; Lienzo de Tlapiltepec, Lienzo Seler II, Selden Roll, etc.). Contents of pre-Hispanic prototypes are transferred to the new medium, that is, the format of the *lienzo*. The resulting changes in their structure have far-reaching consequences: The simultaneity of events or processes such as the perambulation of the cardinal points, which in the codices is depicted across several pages, becomes visible at one glance on a single large-format medium. The chronological sequence, in contrast, is no longer unambiguous; an example of this is the stages of the migration route. In some documents, territory is shown enclosed by both a (jaguar-skin) boundary and boundaries set out in a row (e.g., Lienzo Seler II; Boone 2000a: 125). In the pre-Hispanic codices, horizontally aligned rows of place glyphs have various functions (Pohl 1994),

¹³ Romero Frizzi gives English translations of excerpts of the text (2010: 99-100), as well as the complete text in Zapotec (2003: 393-448).

¹⁴ Romero Frizzi points to the "cold and formal tone" of the Memoria de Juquila as compared to the "more emotional style" of other primordial titles and the latter's character as a "theatrical work" (2012: 102).

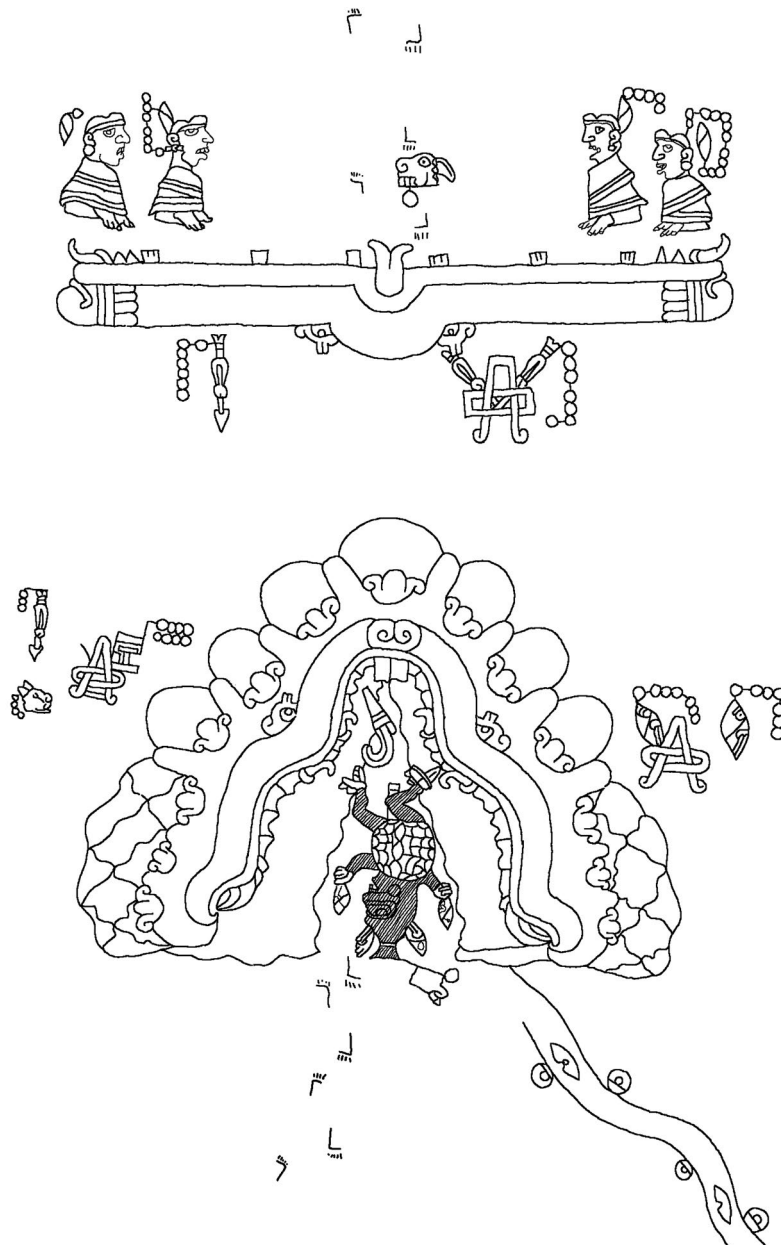


Figure 6. The Selden Roll. A *yahui* is born from the opened jaw of Chicomoztoc represented as the Earth Monster (drawing: Renate Sander).

but they are never used as markers of fixed boundary lines. The *lienzos* thus reveal the influence of European cartographic conventions.

Regional transitional documents were produced in the Coixtlahuaca Valley. Some of these integrate several versions of origin stories (Parmenter 1982: 38–44, 62). Version 1 corresponds to the origin myth of the Mixteca Alta as described above:

1. Descent of the deity or culture hero 9 Wind from the sky to earth.
2. Birth of the first humans from either the river ‘Feathers and Jade’ or the earth (Figure 5).¹⁵
3. ‘Cult of 9 Wind’ into which the priest or supernatural being Lord 2 Dog is actively involved. The cult aims to make the earth fertile and establish human rule.
4. Symbolic drilling of the New Fire at the MKFS as an act of legitimizing the foundation of the village. The MKFS is characterized by either a jewel (Codex Vindobonensis 38) or a quetzal bird (Lienzo de Tlapiltepec, Selden Roll), both having the meaning of ‘precious’.

Version 2 differs from the codices of the Mixteca Alta with regard to the episode between the arrival of 9 Wind on earth and the New Fire drilling when the settlement is founded. It has some elements in common with the documents from Central Mexico:¹⁶

1. Beginnings in the sky.
2. Birth of the *yahui* priest from either the maw of the earth monster or Chicomoztoc, the cave with seven passages (Figure 6).¹⁷
3. Migration from Chicomoztoc. Four or more culture heroes/priests migrate from place to place, carrying the ‘9 Wind cult bundle’ and other insignia.¹⁸
4. At the MKFS, the founding of the settlement is legitimized by means of the New Fire Ceremony. The iconography of that mountain shows two feathered serpents featuring attributes of Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca (quetzal bird, jewel, flint knife, jaguar, eagle [Selden Roll, Lienzo de Tlapiltepec]) as well as Mixcoatl’s black eye mask and clouds (Figure 7).¹⁹

¹⁵ The birth-giving tree (near Apoala?) is only found in the pre-Hispanic codices of the Mixteca Alta.

¹⁶ For example, from Estado de México, Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz.

¹⁷ Lienzo de Tlapiltepec. The *yahui* is known from Mixtec sources. For its meaning see Rincon Mautner 2005: 123.

¹⁸ Selden Roll; in the Codex Egerton from the Mixteca Baja the migration is undertaken by six culture heroes.

¹⁹ In the act of creation he was the bringer of flint and fire. The Codex Egerton portrays him as the initiator of the migration; in that codex, the attributes of the place glyph – serpent, eagle, jaguar, flints – are arranged in a different manner.

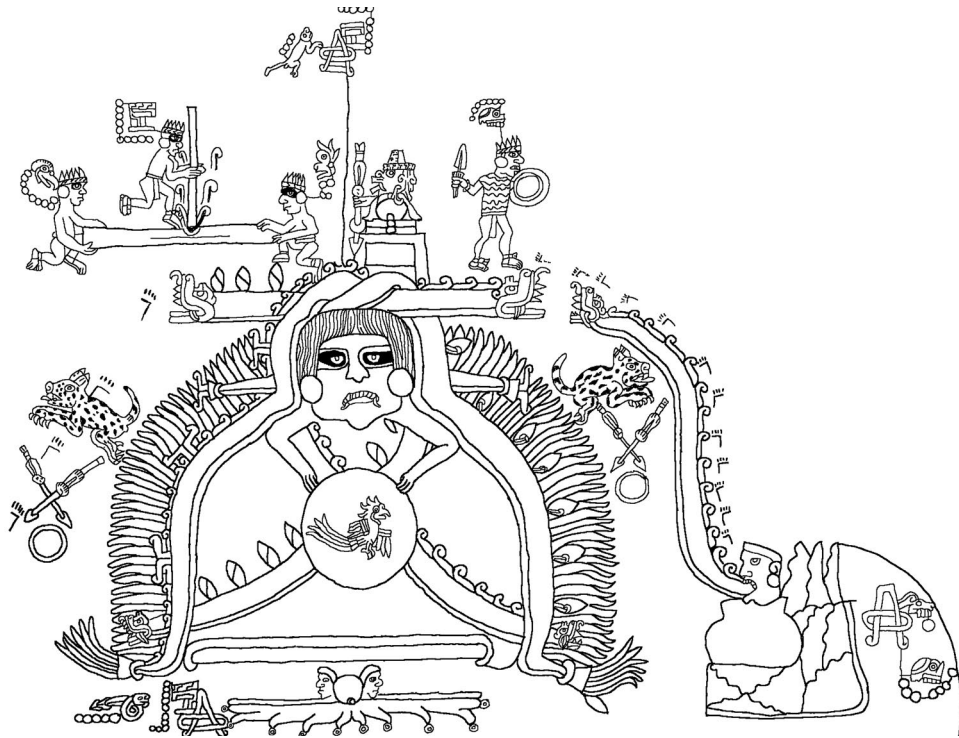


Figure 7. The Selden Roll. Drilling the Fire at 'Mountain of knotted feathered serpents' personified as Mixcoatl and Quetzal (drawing: Renate Sander).

5. MKFS is located in the immediate vicinity of 'Rock Mountain with Pot' and a nude figure bathing in the river.²⁰
6. Additional elements establish a direct connection with the birth-giving cave of Chicomoztoc: Sun, moon, and *yahui* priest (Selden Roll; Lienzo Seler II; Lienzo de Tlapiltepec).
7. The cardinal points, which are marked as checkerboards (Figure 3), surround the central MKFS (Lienzo de Tlapiltepec; Selden Roll; Boone 2000: figs. 146, 158, note 11).

²⁰ Known from the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan 2* (MC2) and the *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca* (HTC) (Carrasco & Sessions 2007).

The task of putting both versions side by side on the traditional stripe format of the codices must have posed quite a challenge to the authors in the Coixtlahuaca Valley. The *lienzos* could be larger in size, and thus made it possible to depict more details and alternative versions of migration and the founding of settlements. Boone refers to them as “mixed genre” (Boone 2000a: 2). This is illustrated by a comparison of the Selden Roll, which is in the stripe format, with the Lienzos de Tlapiltepec and Seler II.

In alternating depictions, the Selden Roll very succinctly shows only parts of the two versions:

1. Like in the Codex Vindobonensis (48), the story begins with the creator couple 1 Deer and 1 Deer sitting in the sky.
2. In the year of 1 Reed, Day 1 Crocodile they dispatch the supernatural culture hero Lord 9 Wind. Flanked by Sun and Moon, he descends to earth; access is via Chicomoztoc.
3. A *yahui* (priest) carrying knives leaves the cave. On a special path (a band of stars and flint) in the sky/darkness he travels to his destination (Figure 6).
4. Four culture heroes, distinguished as Nahuatl speakers by their black face painting, crown, and costume (Anders, Jansen & Pérez Jiménez 1992: 189, nota 14), present themselves before 9 Wind, who is at the ‘Place of the Ballcourt’ and gives them his cult bundle. One of them returns to Chicomoztoc.
5. The ‘migration’ of the four men is actually a war expedition: Successively they conquer ‘Place of the Jaguar’, ‘Place of the Eagle’, and ‘Place of the Parrot’.
6. After a conversation with 2 Mazatl, the four men pass by the river with the bathing figure named 6 Mazatl, and arrive at their destination after crossing a mountain pass (?).
7. On top of the MKFS is the cult bundle of 9 Wind. From this point on, the scenes are bordered by the four cardinal points. The combination with the checkerboard – the Mixtec symbol of the warpath – suggests that the new territory needs to be defended against outside enemies.
8. On the day 4 Lizard of the year 10 House the four migrants/culture heroes perform the New Fire Ceremony.²¹

At a glance, the Selden Roll succinctly shows the most important elements of Mesoamerican migration:

²¹ For a detailed interpretation of the route in the Selden Roll see Castañeda & Doesburg 2008: 179-182.

1. Origins in the sky.
2. Transformation at Chicomoztoc (Figure 6).
3. Receipt of the cult bundle from 9 Wind, beginning of historical time (ballcourt).
4. Alternative migration routes: One is warlike and based on conquest, the other is supernatural and taken by *yahui*.
5. New Fire Ceremony at the MKFS, the center at the intersection of the four cardinal points which is depicted as being 'alive' (Figure 7).

The principal actors are: The culture hero 9 Wind and *yahui* (both of them supernatural beings) as well as four bringers of culture (humans, priests (?) and Nahua-speaking).

In the case of the Lienzo de Tlapiltepec and Lienzo Seler II, large cotton cloths are used to simultaneously integrate both origin models. On the Lienzo de Tlapiltepec, which is comparable to a genealogical-historical codex, the scenes are depicted in the lower left quarter. On the Lienzo Seler II, Chicomoztoc appears in the lower right quarter. The latter *lienzo* also represents an attempt to depict a map. However, its authors did not attach much importance to the migration as such but rather to its outcome: The key event is the New Fire Ceremony at the MKFS, surrounded by 16 ruler couples and place glyphs (König 1984: 268). The number of 16 place glyphs corresponds to that in the last four pages, or the fourth part, of the Codex Vindobonensis obverse. All place glyphs are connected with the MKFS by fine lines, and one line goes directly to Chicomoztoc in the lower right quarter of the Lienzo Seler II.

What is hiding behind the MKFS depicted in a central position beneath the New Fire drilling? Is it a real place? What is the nature of the connection between the other places, particularly the main village Coixtlahuaca (Plain of the Serpent), and the MKFS? Are these places even dependent on the MKFS?

Boone points out that the MKFS is a "still unidentified but important location", which in any case "seems to represent the origin point for many polities in the area" (Boone 2000a: 152, 160).

If this is the case: Where would such a spiritual and political center, the site or source used to legitimize the founding of settlements, have been located? I will return to this question below.

Examples from Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico

The early colonial documents from this region, which represent individual variants of pre-Hispanic migration, settlement, and occupation of places as viewed from the perspective of the Cuauhtinchantlaca, have been excellently analyzed (see, among others, Boone 2000a; Carrasco & Sessions 2007; Leibsohn 2009). A comparison of these

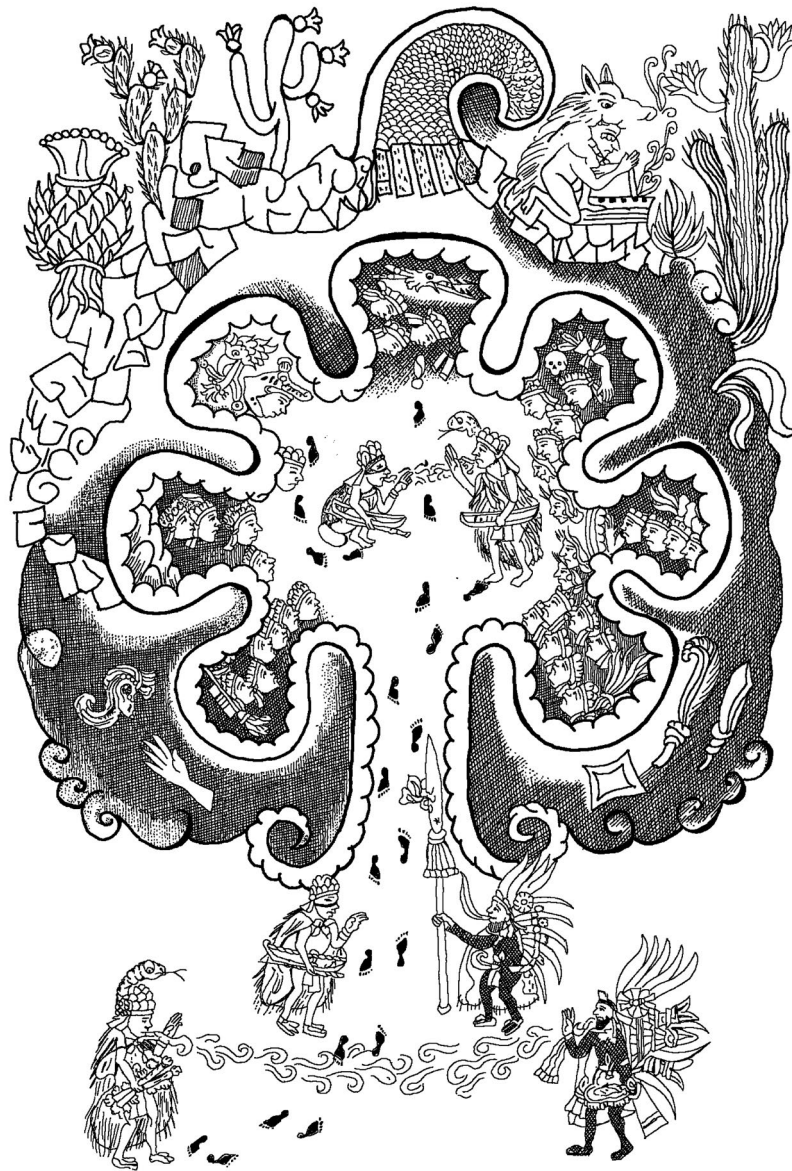


Figure 8. Historia Tolteca Chichimeca. Chicomoztoc represented as seven caves in a mountain in a dry and rocky area with abundant cactuses (drawing: Renate Sander).

documents with the Mixtec codices and *lienzos* is instructive. According to Carrasco & Sessions, there was an interethnic competition between the two regions of the Mixteca-Puebla “[...] to assert the sacred rights of ruling lineages vis à vis the territory occupied by the group” (2007: 12-13).

Prior to the arrival of the Mexica (Aztecs) in Central Mexico and the establishment of the Aztec empire, various multiethnic and multilingual city-states shared the power in Central Mexico. They all “claimed a common heritage through an origin myth in which the first Chichimeca tribal bands emerged from the seven caves of Chichimoztoc” (Pohl 1994: 143). The individual variants of the migration and settlement stories were recorded on various media from early colonial times onward, both pictographically and in Latin script. It is likely that their content is based on pre-Hispanic prototypes. Examples include the *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca* (HTC) and the *Mapas de Cuauhtinchan* (MC).²² The migrations are complex, and their basic pattern differs from the pre-Hispanic Mixtec codices and *lienzos* in several respects: “The Mixtec Codices indicate that Oaxacan kings gained title by reckoning direct descent from various divine ancestors born from trees, caves, rivers, heavens and so forth.” (Pohl 1994: 155) However, the *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca*, the *Mapas de Cuauhtinchan*, etc., are about ‘elected’ leaders – for example, the son of the mythical culture hero Camaxtli-Mixcoatl who emerges from Chicomoztoc in the beginning (Figure 8). “Emphasis [...] is on a legendary migration saga that led to the establishment of the principal Teccalli as political units and not on the patrilineal descent reckoning of individual kings” (Pohl 1994: 155).²³

Nevertheless, David Carrasco’s summary of what is shown on the MC2 applies to what appears on all documents of the Coixtlahuaca group:

- 1) the dynamic picture of emergence from Chicomoztoc and its associated New Fire Ceremony in the upper left corner, 2) the monumental city of Cholula [see Figure 9] just left of the vertical blue line in the center symbolizing the Atoyac River, and 3) the ritual settlement of Cuauhtinchan near the center of the right side of the map (Carrasco & Sessions 2007: 1).

Comparison with Lienzo Seler II: Carrasco’s 1) corresponds to the fine line (part of which is destroyed) connecting Chicomoztoc on the right with the complete New Fire Ceremony in the center. Carrasco’s 2) corresponds to the MKFS. The Lienzo Seler II, too, features a river at the foot of the mountain. Carrasco’s 3) has a different structure in the Lienzo Seler II; this is not surprising, as the settlement shown is not Cuauhtinchan.

22 The *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca* (1547-1560) is kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France [Fonds Mexicain 46-58]. It contains Latin-script texts in Nahuatl language and illustrations in mixed pre-Hispanic and European style on European paper. The four *Mapas de Cuauhtinchan* are dated to ca. 1550 and are made of *amate* paper.

23 This may be due to the difference between the ancient patrilineal farmer society of the Mixtecs, symbolized by a tree or river giving birth, and matrilineal groups of hunters and gatherers symbolized by caves, animal-skin clothing, and hunting equipment.

Villages on a jaguar-skin border form a clearly defined boundary enclosing the central double place glyph of Coixtlahuaca. On the mc2, in contrast, the circumambulation still symbolizes a path, a route that has been completed. The migration has come to an end, and the boundaries have been established (Wake 2007: 206).

Comparison with Codex Vindobonensis: The events on the long, winding path in the left part of the mc2 correspond to pages 5-21 (or 31) of the Codex Vindobonensis: The arduous journey ‘over the mountain and through the valley’ and the ritual of founding a settlement, which is shown 1 + 9, or 2 x 4 times around the center. The labyrinth path has the function to illustrate

[...] that they achieved their homeland and control over communal property through a series of renewal ritual ordeals as well as calculated boundary-making ritual that allowed them to negotiate with neighboring polities the spread of their own sacred vision of the world (Carrasco & Sessions 2007: 18).

In the pre-Hispanic Codex Vindobonensis, we obviously encounter the migration pattern “in a typical Mesoamerican way” (Carrasco & Sessions 2007: 430). In the early 16th century, this pattern was documented both in pictographic and Latin-script records not only in the Zapotec *Memorias Primordiales* (see above), but also in multiethnic Cuauhtinchan region of Central Mexico, which was then dominated by Nahuatl speakers (Wake 2007: 207). While the details vary over time and space, the pattern of migration and settlement foundation remains the same.

As in the Coixtlahuaca Valley, the codex/stripe format became replaced by new formats in the Cuauhtinchan region, because the indigenous authors in Central Mexico wanted to make a clear distinction between the depiction of the mythical-historical migration from Chicomoztoc to the site of eventual settlement (mc2, left) and the depiction of the territory that represented a ‘cartographic’ reality (mc2, right) according to the standards prevailing after conquest. The map and boundary integrated into the picture were an expression of progressiveness in a new era in which so much importance was attached to this new medium. The Lienzo Seler II, the mcs, and particularly the HTC (Leibsohn 2009) are striking examples of this; in different ways, they succeed in combining a Latin-script description and mixed indigenous-European pictographic illustrations.

Mexica and other examples from the Central Valleys

Not a single pre-Hispanic original has survived from the Valley of Mexico, in contrast to the Mixtec Codex Vindobonensis. All existing sources are from a time when the region was already under European influence, even those documents which correspond to pre-Hispanic models – on the one hand. On the other hand, not only the Aztec nobility but also Spanish missionaries were particularly eager to capture the pre-Hispanic world

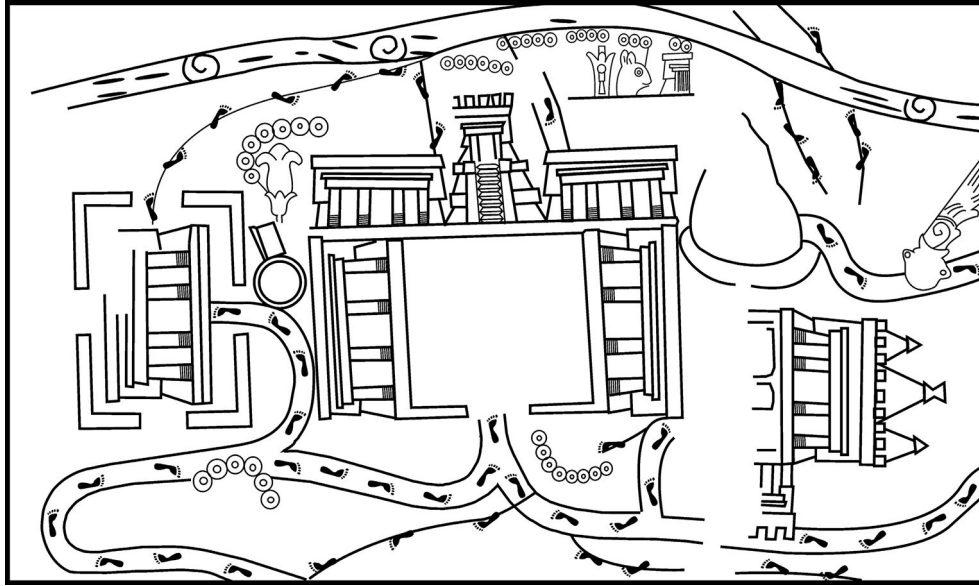


Figure 9. Mapa de Cuauhtinchan 2. The city center of Cholula (drawing: Renate Sander).

both in pictures and Latin script. The Codex Borbonicus is probably based on a specific pre-Hispanic document. However, Boone notes an important difference between the pre-Hispanic Mixtec codices and the Aztec documents of the colonial period: “The Codex Vienna shows how the supernaturals identified and named the location in the Mixteca; colonial pictorials and *títulos* from Central Mexico describe how the Nahuatl walked and identified their boundaries, now as a circuit around the territory” (Boone 2000b).²⁴

The Codex Xolotl, a series of *mapas* showing the migrations of the Chichimecs and the establishment of their *altepetl* under their leader Xolotl, has the following structure:

1. Settlement and appropriation of foreign territory
2. Hunting grounds are made into arable land
3. Establishment of the polity and hereditary rulership (dynasty), as well as distribution of the new territory among Xolotl’s relatives

Similar patterns are found in the Mapa Tlotzin and the Mapa Quinatzin (Florescano 2006).

²⁴ The European ritual of circumambulation goes back to Roman times and the god Terminus. However, most authors assume that there was a pre-Hispanic counterclockwise ritual.

Apoala in the Mixteca Alta and Chicomoztoc in the Nahuatl-Mixtec-language region of Central Mexico play a key role in the history of migration and settlement. The same is true of Aztlan, the Aztecs' mythical place of origin, their migration to the inhospitable island in the middle of Lake Texcoco, and the establishment of their capital Tenochtitlán. There are many variants of that story. For purposes of legitimization, the Aztec newcomers needed to ensure that the mythology and history of the long-established local Chichimec polities faded into oblivion – a particularly drastic measure was the burning of books at the instigation of Itzcoatl – and that their own, new migration story found general acceptance in the Valley of Mexico. Hence, they basically retained the traditional Mesoamerican pattern of migration, settlement, and act of ritual legitimization (Navarrete 2000b: 314-315). Navarrete distinguishes the following patterns in the various versions of Mexica migration, which he calls “visual narratives”:

[the] most remarkable of these conventions is a set of lines or blocks marking distance and duration that unites the towns of Aztlan and Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the beginning and the end of the Mexica migration, and that appears in different guises in all the codices dealing with that historical event (Navarrete 2000a: 31).

Of the six pictographic documents dealing with the Mexica migration, the Codex Boturini (*Tira de la Peregrinación*) is the one that presents the model par excellence of the Mexica migration: Two types of connecting lines are used simultaneously to indicate a) the spatial distance between the place of origin (Aztlan) and the destination (Mexico-Tenochtitlan), and b) the duration of the journey: a) footsteps representing the spatial distance between place glyphs and b) a continuous line connecting year signs as the temporal markers of the route taken. Both lines are interconnected, because the footsteps always begin next to a year sign: “In this way, time and space are integrated into a single narrative of the journey of the Mexica from Aztlan (a given place at a given time) to Mexico (a different place at a later time)” (Navarrete 2000a: 31).

The other documents, too, use space- and timelines to create exemplary records of their migration histories, “uniting time and space into a single whole”, regardless of their format and regardless of whether they are structured as so-called annals, ‘maps’, or text blocks in Latin script with pictographic elements (Navarrete 2000a: 35). This leads Navarrete to conclude that these documents “must have been used as visual narrative devices that provided a framework for the whole migration story” (Navarrete 2000a: 36).

The migration story of the Mexica, like that of other peoples, served only one purpose: the legitimization of their newly appropriated territory in the Valley of Mexico. Mexico-Tenochtitlan was the place promised by their divine leader Huitzilopochtli, and the final destination of their arduous migration after many stopovers such as Chicomoztoc, Coatepec and, eventually, Chapultepec (Navarrete 2000a, 2000b).

Metaphorical places and place glyphs of the Mesoamerican migrations

It is conspicuous that specific places or place glyphs seem to be obligatory elements of the history of migration and settlement. The most recent addition was Aztlán, the Mexica's place of origin. Pohl has proposed that

[...] the Aztlán legend is metaphorical [...] [L]egends associated with particular geographical features, mountains, rivers, and so forth, were recounted by tribal chiefs as directional locators in the course of seasonal hunting and foraging migrations. In the interest of emphasizing an 'outsider's' divine right to rule, the stories were subsequently reconfigured to legitimize the establishment of Postclassic Tolteca-Chichimeca city-states, even though the political reality of the people employing the stories had little to do with the desert hunting strategies for which they were originally intended (Pohl 2003b).

The Mexica adopt familiar places known from the multiethnic documents from Central Mexico and the Coixtlahuaca Valley, particularly the 'Seven Caves' of Chicomoztoc and the 'serpent mountain' Coatepec.

In order to understand the basic pattern of the Mesoamerican migration model, is it important to localize the mythic place of origin? Is it supposed to be intentionally localizable in the first place? Or does the basic pattern allow for a variable manner of including the respective regional details of the origin myths?

The sequences on the pages of the pre-Hispanic, strip-shaped codices are strictly structured. In contrast, the depictions of mythical origin, migration, and acts of foundation and legitimization seem to be mixed with the geographical and historical reality of places, genealogies, and events on the *lienzos* from the Coixtlahuaca Valley. The documents from Puebla, on the other hand, show solutions with regard to a clear distinction between pre-Hispanic origins and post-conquest geographic reality (Carrasco & Sessions 2007).

Chicomoztoc and the 'serpent mountains' are iconographically conspicuous place glyphs in all documents:

Chicomoztoc – place of origin and transformation

Navarrete characterizes Chicomoztoc as a place that "[...] was mentioned in the histories of many different Mesoamerican peoples and was considered a place of origin and transformation in which migrating peoples acquired new identities" (Navarrete 2000a: 40). The importance of this place of origin, as well as of the processes of 'being born' or 'transformation into a new identity' that happen there, becomes evident from the wide distribution of origin caves in Mesoamerica and the similarities in their depiction from the Mixteca Alta (Codex Nuttall 1) to the Valley of Mexico. While there have been many efforts to establish the specific location of Chicomoztoc,

[...] most modern authorities tend to consider Chicomoztoc to be a mythical rather than an actual place. Chicomoztoc represents the idea of the emergence of human beings from cavities in the body of the earth [...] As time passed, the guardians of the Mesoamerican tradition preserved their sense of identity and origin by re-creating Chicomoztoc at their sites [...] In this sense, all the chroniclers and historians are correct, because many Chicomoztoc existed in all parts of Mesoamerica (Aguilar *et al.* 2005: 83).

Coatepec – place of transition from myth to reality

Coatepec is the place where the mythical past ends and historical reality begins, such as the migration of a new ethnic group, the Mexica, with the new cult of Huitzilopochtli to the Valley of Mexico (Castañeda & Doesburg 2008: 165). Castañeda and van Doesburg use the Codex Azcatitlan and the Tira de la Peregrinación to analyze the ‘concept of Coatepec’ as to its functions. With the moment of their arrival in Coatepec, the Mexica enter history. They are now contemporaries of those currently in power.

The first sunrise in the history of humankind, which was now measurable by means of the calendar, happened in Coatepec. A New Fire Ceremony in commemoration of that first time was henceforth celebrated every 52 years. The New Fire Ceremony represents a fresh start and new beginning, and the Mexica chose Coatepec as the site of that event (Castañeda & Doesburg 2008: 169).²⁵

Is it possible to locate Coatepec geographically? Or is the place glyph a symbolic depiction, an archetype that can be integrated into the landscape at will (Castañeda & Doesburg 2008: 172)? The Mexica located Coatepec in the vicinity of Tula, the place of transition from nomadic life in the wide expanses of the north to sedentarism in the Valley of Mexico where agriculture was practiced. The Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan was a symbolic replica of Coatepec – the important stopover in the Mexica’s migration – and at the same time a site commemorating the birth of Huitzilopochtli and the death of his sister Coyolxauhqui, both of which also happened in Coatepec (López Luján 2005: 364, footnote 15 to chapter 4).²⁶

It is not possible to establish the exact location of Coatepec. Alternatives to Tula have been suggested, some of them outside the core territory of the Mexica (Umberger 1996: 89-97). In the context of the pattern of migration, Coatepec is of importance as the indicator of a new beginning.

Are the MKFS and Coatepec identical? Castañeda and van Doesburg establish that connection. According to their interpretation, the place glyph and site of the New Fire Ceremony in the documents of the Coixtlahuaca group is Coatepec, and they argue that it was brought to the Coixtlahuaca Valley by migrants from the north: “Coatepec tiene principalmente connotaciones de frontera temporal. Marca el inicio de un

²⁵ The two authors give references on this from the relevant sources.

²⁶ Referring, among other sources, to Tezozómoc, Sahagún, Selser, and plate 6 in the Codice Azcatitlan.

nuevo tiempo, de un nuevo amanecer, tanto en el centro de México como en el valle de Coixtlahuaca” (Castañeda & Doesburg 2008: 179-189). They further argue that marking the general function of a new beginning – be it an era, the establishment of new power structures, a new ruling dynasty, or the foundation of a new settlement at the end of migration – does not necessarily require the inclusion of all iconographic details (Castañeda & Doesburg 2008: 191).

Mountain of interlocked feathered serpents (MKFS)

The distinctive MKFS (Selden Roll, Lienzos Tlapiltepec y Seler II) or ‘mountain of knotted cord’ (Codex Vindobonensis: 38) is only found in Mixtec-Popolloca documents. The place glyph alludes to being ‘bound’, that is, occupied for settlement (Megged 2010: 184, 185). It is evidence of the act of legitimized appropriation at a powerful location. Rincon Mautner assumes that the Tolteca-Chichimeca tradition of the Great Goddess, who had once been tied up by the huge serpent bodies of the transformed deities Quetzalcoatl and Tetzcatlipoca²⁷ when the world was created, was of particular importance in the Coixtlahuaca Valley. It is this importance that is symbolized by the MKFS. The New Fire Ceremony was not only held to legitimize ownership of land (Rincon Mautner 2005: 123, 136); it was also held in a place that allowed for a re-enactment of the creation of the world. This is particularly apparent in the ‘living’ MKFS of the Selden Roll. According to Wake, the

[...] toponym of the Realm of Entertwined Serpents of the Coixtlahuaca Valley [...] also marked Mixteca-Popolloca transition from sacred to real history [...] a symbol of the beginning of Coixtlahuaca as a united Popolloca nation and not the federation’s real geographical name (Wake 2007: 231).

The question of “Where?” and a hypothesis: Are MKFS and Cholula identical?

Did the authors in the Coixtlahuaca Valley actually position a purely symbolical place on their documents in such an oversize manner? Is MKFS or ‘Mountain of knotted Quetzalcoatl’s’ not a geographical name at all?²⁸ As a matter of fact, there exists a very real place which was dedicated to the cult of Quetzalcoatl and served as a site of legitimization with regard to claims to land ownership and power: Cholula with its artificial mountain (Aztec: Tlachihualtepetl), the largest pyramid of the world: “[...] the ancient city of Cholula was invested with the power to confer authority of rulership across Mesoamerica” (Wake 2007: 213). Indirectly, the same author gives an additional hint:

27 He is sometimes also depicted with the attributes of Mixcoatl.

28 This also applies to variants featuring flint or clouds.

Coixtlahuaca's sacred history essentially evokes Lord 7 Water Atonal's migration from the central area to the founding of the Realm of Entwined Serpents [...] But Lord 7 Water Atonal did not arrive in [...] Coixtlahuaca from Chicomoztoc. By authority of Cholula, his ancestors had probably occupied, and ruled over, the area of Cuauhtinchan for many centuries (Wake 2007: 231).

The MKFS is certainly more than just a symbol of the “start of the lineage of those ancestors” (Wake 2007: 231). Boone describes the function of Cholula's depiction as a monumental city in the MC2 as follows: “Cholula functions as the pivot of the story, the link between the tour of the journey and the tableau of the founding, and it is the place where the Chichimecs are given permission to found new *altepetl*” (Boone 2000a: 177, 178). This description reflects the central position of the MKFS in the documents from the Coixtlahuaca Valley. However, remembrance both of the “permission to found new *altepetl*” and the symbol-laden establishment of the settlement is more important in this context than a true-to-life depiction of the settlement's layout as given in the MC2.

Not only in the early colonial documents from Puebla such as the HTC and the MC1-4, but also in the Mixtec codices there are many references to the extraordinary importance of Cholula (Brownstone 2015: 47-53), which was the destination of pilgrims and political leaders who came from far-away places to have their rule legitimized by means of the nose-piercing.²⁹ Cholula's importance as a hub of religion and trade has been compared to that of Rome, “as a place where status, identity, clothing and access to land were transformed” (Carrasco & Sessions 2007: 17).

Pohl refers to statements by Sahagún and Durán, according to whom

Quetzalcoatl, son of the Chichimec warlord Camaxtli-Mixcoatl [...] by most accounts [...] established a new cult center at Cholula. [...] The odyssey of Quetzalcoatl was revered by more than a dozen different ethnic groups who claimed that the penitent hero had traveled through their kingdoms to establish his cult and mark the surrounding landscape with pictographs and other signs to commemorate his journey [...] At the time of the Conquest, the principal seat of Quetzalcoatl's cult was centered at Cholula (Pohl 2003a).

Being the major interethnic center in Puebla at the intersection of Central Mexico and the Mixteca, Cholula was the place where the establishment of new settlements after completed migration was legitimized by means of New Fire Ceremonies and re-enactments, comparable to the nose-piercing ceremony undergone by new rulers. This act needed to be recorded permanently. The function of Cholula in parts of Mesoamerica would thus have resembled the function ancient Rome had for the rulers of Europe. It is exclusively in this context that Cholula would be depicted as MKFS, similar to a

29 One example is the Mixtec warlord ‘8 Deer Jaguar Claw’ (Byland & Pohl 1994).

crest stamped onto a document, to confirm the legitimization of the establishment of a settlement.

Coatepec was the site of the first sunrise (see above), and in the *Codex Vindobonensis* the sun is depicted rising above a large pyramid. These two examples, too, suggest a connection with Cholula.

Conclusion

In Postclassic Mesoamerica prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, people attached extraordinary importance to pictographic records and oral traditions of origin and migration which concluded with a generic legitimizing ceremony of foundation at the site chosen for settlement. The ribbon-shaped, linear sequences of place glyphs and calendar dates arranged in a symbolic structure represent space that needed to be traversed and time that went by until the final destination was reached. The 13- or 26-day duration of the journey, for example in the *MC2*, is evocative of the ritual character of migrations (Asselbergs 2007: 125; Wake 2007: 213).

The fact that the pictographic documents belonging to, and narrating the history of, other Mesoamerican peoples, such as the Acolhua, Cuauhtinchantlaca, or Mixtec, use markedly different ways of representing space and time, while also managing to incorporate them into a single visual narrative discourse, points to a relationship between these genres and specific ethnic groups (Navarrete 2000a: 44).

Navarrete assumes that the chronotypes of the colonial documents are of pre-Hispanic origin, as “their deep coherence and systematic nature does not correspond to the piecemeal experimentation and adoption of European styles, forms, and conventions that took the sixteenth century”. He has “not found any equivalent visual narrative devices in the Western tradition” (Navarrete 2000a: 44).

Maybe we will never be able to reconstruct the various courses of migration in Mesoamerica after the demise of the Classical centers according to Western concepts of historiography. This is due, among other things, to the fact that Mesoamerican authors recorded an ethnocentric tradition of their own (Wake 2007: 22-24; Brownstone 2015: 45-60). Nevertheless, the ideal basic elements are apparent in all indigenous records.

However, what were the reasons for that focus, and when did Mesoamericans begin to transfer the ‘fixed points’ of the narrative into a stringent dramaturgy, both pictographically and orally?

The HTC reveals that while land quarrels, the establishment of exact boundaries, and the documentation of these events already loomed large under Aztec rule (Wake 2007: 207), they became an even bigger issue after the Spanish conquest when there was a clash of two completely different systems of land use, and communication became vitally important. However, knowledge of a mythical place of origin and migration from

there did not matter to Spanish courts. More helpful was evidence of a long succession of ancestors, but only if there was a clear link to land ownership. Hence, there must have been other reasons for recording migration and settlement foundation in the Postclassic prior to the arrival of the Europeans.

The fact is that Mesoamerica witnessed a renaissance of settlement and emergent state-building following the demise of the Classical centers, which was probably caused by internal problems. There was a continuous movement of people for at least two centuries until the 11th century. Wherever people settled, they needed to safeguard themselves against other newcomers who might also lay claim to the territory. Such safeguard could be provided by a well-documented ceremony of foundation held on a specific date, either after a successfully concluded mission immediately after descent from the sky, or at least after a mystical, semi-divine birth on earth.

O dicho de otro modo, la peregrinación en busca de la tierra prometida, la geografía y el tiempo que enmarcaban ese periplo, la delimitación del suelo, la fundación del pueblo y la proclamación del reino, más la lengua que dotaba de significado a esas acciones, no cobraban realidad si no iban acompañadas por las presencias numerosas que poblaban el mundo sobrenatural y por los ritos y ceremonias que las consagraban (Florescano 2006: n.p.).

What institution could have sanctioned the appropriation of land and claims to power in times of upheaval? The ancient centers of the Classic period had long ceased to exist. In Central Mexico, the Toltecs availed themselves of an existing power vacuum for some time. Then Tula, too, fell due to local rivalries and other reasons. This resulted in a diaspora “memorable, recordada por crónicas, cantos, mitos y un abanico de leyendas” (Florescano 2006: n.p.).

Actually, such a center existed in the Postclassic. It had existed continuously since the Classic period and ‘reinvented’ itself over and over again in the course of the centuries (Carrasco & Sessions 2007), even after events of destruction and devastation: From the 12th century onward, Cholula enjoyed undisputed recognition as an institution with a double function, legitimizing both individual rulers and newly founded settlements under the aegis of the cult of Ehécatl-Quetzalcoatl.³⁰

Graña-Behrens has compared scenes from the pre-Hispanic Codex Borgia, which was probably made in Cholula as well, with scenes in the HTC and the MCS, and discovered a number of congruences. Some specific episodes in the MCS and the HTC may go back to images in the Codex Borgia. Were rites and myths transferred into historical contexts within the framework of memory, and reorganized in the interest of the colonial present?

³⁰ After many years the Tolteca Chichimeca, who had migrated from Tula, eventually succeeded in defeating the old rulers of Cholula, the Olmeca-Xicalanca.

On the whole, there are particular congruences between the history of the Chichimeca's tribal origin as depicted and transliterated in Latin characters in the HTCH and MC2, and sections in the pre-Hispanic Codex Borgia that possibly refer to a creation story (Graña-Behrens 2009: 202).

A complete picture begins to emerge from the jigsaw pieces of previous studies. The Mesoamerican history of creation, migration, and settlement occupies a central place in the various genres both of pre-Hispanic codices and early colonial documents, regardless of the other subjects for whose record the manuscripts were made such as divination, calendar, and the history of rulers and events.

In the present essay, my intention was to analyze the pattern, or model, underlying the history of origin, migration, and settlement, and to reconstruct the *longue durée* of records of this history, which seem to have their origin in the Early Postclassic and in the turmoil experienced by migrating groups.

Three basic models can be distinguished:

1. The pre-Hispanic codices of the Mixteca Alta focus on the story of the creation of the world, the beginnings in the sky and the ritual reclamation of the earth by supernatural powers before humans can be created. According to the codices, humans were born from mountains, rivers, or trees in the heart of the Mixteca Alta (Apoala). The first migration, as well as the first inspection and distribution of the land, are of a divine nature. After that, the story is about how the Mixteca was developed (Boone 2000a: 96-99). The beginning of historical time, marked by the first sunrise, is possibly associated with Cholula.
2. In the colonial documents from Puebla³¹ and the Coixtlahuaca Valley, which feature the migrants from Chicomoztoc, an additional focus is on the history of the connection with the religious, political, and economic center of Cholula, the town with the huge pyramid modeled after a natural mountain in the shape of the *mxks*. Like Jerusalem and Rome, however, Cholula did not need any self-promotion. Rulers who wished to legitimize their status as settlers and their new settlement as the final destination of the big migration referred to Cholula in their documents. The need to integrate several versions from the Mixteca and Central Mexico resulted in the creation of huge cotton cloths as a medium.³²
3. In the descriptions of the Mexica and their Nahuatl-speaking neighbors from colonial times, the world is no longer created. It is encountered in a completed state, but people need to struggle for acceptance in order to assert themselves against

³¹ The only surviving pre-Hispanic document is the Codex Borgia.

³² According to Castañeda & Doesburg (2008: 186) it had become necessary to document different origins that resulted from marriage alliances.

those who already inhabit the final destination of migration. The Aztecs make no secret of the fact that they came to the Valley of Mexico as nomadic hunters (archers clad in animal skins) and had first to become agriculturists. In the Mexica versions featuring the migrants from Aztlan, parts of the migration history of their neighbors are adapted, such as the transformation in Chicomoztoc and the fresh start in Coatepec. They arrive at their final destination at the chosen site in the Valley, and establish a new center of power based on the ancient tradition of migration.

Mesoamerican migration stories have the following aspects in common (Figure 10):

1. Birth from cleavages (caves, trees), end of mythic time.
2. Mission of four (+-) culture heroes/leaders.
3. Acts of transformation (bestowal of names, calendar counts, end of barbarism, begin of civilization).
4. Reference to the cardinal points (definition of territory).
5. New Fire Ceremonies (act of foundation).

The function of the symbol of the ballcourt in the Selden Roll, the Lienzo de Tlapiltepec, the HTC and other documents might mark a caesura: “separation of the space between the world of men and the world of gods [...] the separation of time into periods [...], ballcourts and ballgames are associated with boundaries” (Gillespie 1991: 339). However, further research is needed.

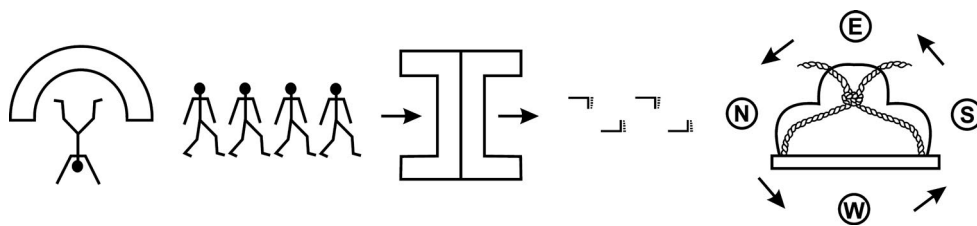


Figure 10. Diagram of the Mesoamerican migration story (drawing: Renate Sander).

Outlook: Routes to the north and back (?)

Millions of Mexicans have left their country to improve their living conditions by labor migration to the USA and Canada. They make the same experience as all other migrants in the world: The search for their own roots does only begin when their old home is irretrievably gone, having been replaced by a new homeland: Who am I? Where do I come from? Why did my ancestors leave their native land? What was it like there?

Formerly, the history of migration in Mesoamerica was of interest to a small community of researchers all over the world. This has changed in the course of the new migration of the 20th and 21st centuries. The subject has assumed a new dimension for the migrants themselves (Fields 2001).

What would their visual narrative look like? For example, would there be two lines, one connecting the Mixteca with Mexico City and another running from there to California across a broad boundary line? Would the narrative record journeys abroad and back home undertaken once or twice a year? And if the migrants were recorded, would there be more of them each time they leave the Mixteca? Do the migrants return, or will there eventually be no more travel movements because the Mixteca is devoid of people? What happens to the places of departure? Will they become sites of memory? It is up to future research to answer all these questions.

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